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TRIAL IN NEW ORLEANS

It has taken quite a while for the case of the State of Louisiana against Clay Shaw to come to trial. Five and a half years, to be pretty exact. It was only three days after the assassination of President John Kennedy in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963, that the District Attorney of New Orleans Parish (county), James Garrison, arrested four men, interrogated them regarding a conspiracy to murder the President and turned them over to the FBI. Clay Shaw was not one of the four. But three and a half years later, on March 1, 1967, Shaw was arrested and charged with "conspiring with Ferrie (who was one of the four), (Lee Harvey) Oswald and others" to assassinate President Kennedy.

During the five and a half years from November 25, 1963, to the present, or at least from February 17, 1967, when the New Orleans newspaper the States-Item disclosed that Mr. Garrison had been and was conducting an investigation into a conspiracy to murder Mr. Kennedy, the District Attorney of New Orleans rather than a possible conspiracy became the object of national interest. It is no exaggeration to say that Mr. Garrison has been accorded a trial-by-publicity, with the aim of discrediting not only himself but of course his investigation and his charges of conspiracy.

It has always seemed to us that the proper attitude to have taken on this matter, as on all such proceedings, was to let the law take its course and to withhold all judgments until Mr. Shaw—presumed innocent, of course, until proved otherwise—had his day in court. Therefore we have been unable to understand the difficulties which federal and state government officials, and the Shaw defense attorneys for that matter, although they have no doubt acted in what they felt to be the best interests of their client, placed in the way of Mr. Garrison's efforts to bring the case to trial.

Allen Dulles, director of the CIA, was for example subpoenaed and refused to testify. The federal government has declined to release autopsy data on the murdered President as well as other pieces of possible evidence, such as his clothing. (This issue is still being argued in federal court.) Governor Reagan of California refused to extradite another man charged with Shaw as a conspirator. Shaw's counsel requested an injunction to prevent Mr. Garrison from prosecuting. When, in early December, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected the request for an injunction, the trial date was finally set. It began, as scheduled, on January 21.

In his opening statement Mr. Garrison said "the state will establish" that President Kennedy and former Governor John Connally, riding with Mr. Kennedy in the presidential limousine, "were wounded as a result of gunshots fired by different guns at different locations." He said the state will establish that Shaw and others engaged in acts of conspiracy to assassinate the President and that crossfire by two or three gunmen as well as escape routes and alibis were discussed. Such, in general, is what the trial proceeding in New Orleans is all about. Now we shall see what we shall see.